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Performance Anxiety: Sport and Work in Germany from the Empire to Nazism.

By *Michael Hau*. German and European Studies, volume 25. Edited by *Jennifer J. Jenkins*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. Pp. xviii1362. \$75.00.

As the *Sonderweg* (special path) thesis has faded as the key explanatory framework for modern German history, a consideration of "biopolitics" has risen to prominence among historians. This approach examines social, economic, medical, and scientific policies that aim to improve the health, efficiency, and potency of individuals and the nation as a whole. Early interpretations of biopolitics and German history emphasized the racist, social Darwinist, and eugenic policies of National Socialism; Detlev Peukert argued that the National Socialist agenda was a "radicalized version of schemes of social policy that had been advocated, sometimes on optimistic progressive grounds, since the turn of the century." The biopolitical framework allows for comparisons of the German National Socialist state with other modern societies. In Peukert's words, "National Socialism demonstrated with heightened clarity and murderous consistency, the pathologies and seismic fractures of the modern civilizing process" (Inside Nazi Germany [New Haven, CT, 1987], 248).

Hau makes an important contribution to this literature in his examination of sports as a means to achieve biopolitical ends. Like the work of Corinna Treitel, Geoff Eley, and Edward Ross Dickinson, Hau's project encourages us to broaden our understanding of the diverse ways that biopolitical goals could be pursued, including housing policies, maternal care, early childhood education, personal hygiene, nutrition guidelines, welfare services, public health campaigns, health insurance regulations, tax policies, hospital administration, or medical guidelines.

In his research, Michael Hau connects sports and *Leistung* (performance) and traces the meanings of *Leistung* as the ideals associated with performance shifted over time. His exact title, "Performance Anxiety" reflects elite concerns about the health, competitive spirit, and abilities of the German population. Hau considers how sports leaders, exercise experts, and academics evaluated the potential and strengths of the German population. Although the level of coercion changed over time, across the sixty years he examines, Hau shows how elites believed that exercise and sports could bring concrete benefits to Germans as individuals and the German people as a whole. *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength Through Joy) became a key part of National Socialist ideology and an explicit organization within the National Socialist state, but going back to the late Imperial period, elites believed that sports and exercise could change people's attitudes, temperaments, and ideas about themselves. Hau contributes to studies that consider the ways that elites use "technologies of subjectivization" in the form of sports as a way to instill discipline, morality, and a competitive spirit.

Hau begins in late Imperial Germany and traces his story through the end of World War II, and he shows a common approach across these periods even among individuals who come from diametrically opposing political perspectives. From the 1890s to the 1940s, German experts called on Germans to increase their involvement in sports to enhance societal cohesion across class lines, to improve their ability to perform in the work-place, and to increase their own personal happiness. Reformers in the 1890s and Nazi leaders both expressed the sense that Germans needed to do more to reach the goals that they had set.

In the conclusion, Hau draws out the differences between the views of progressive reformers, Weimar democrats, and National Socialists. The reformers and Weimar democrats emphasized *Fürsorge* or social care; exercise was to be voluntary, and leaders stressed personal choice, individual opportunity, and diverse paths to recovery especially for injured veterans of World War I. Weimar progressive leaders deemphasized national or company productive goals, even if some Conservative leaders in this period believed that sport could be used to create a docile workforce of men who would "obey, shut up . . . [and] accept authority" (219). The National Socialist approach to performance accelerated parts of the previous German pattern. All who were considered German were expected to seek the peaks of performance both for themselves and for the German people as a whole. The Nazi period saw new emphasis placed on the possibility of rising through merit or mobility as a result of performance as well as increased punishment for those who were deemed work-shy or antisocial.

Two particularly interesting themes of women and sports and disability and sports are examined across the different time periods. The glorification of the Aryan body, the Darwinian views, and the punishing demands on those considered weak would seem to work at cross purposes against a Nationalist Socialist sympathetic treatment of disabled veterans. At the same time, for individual soldiers on the ground, the knowledge that they would receive state support and respect even if they came back from war wounded might well have shaped their willingness to take risks and fight to the end of their abilities. In this way, the National Socialists had no choice but to take a rehabilitative approach to wounded veterans and disabled veterans.

For the debates over the impact of National Socialist ideology on the opportunities for women (Atina Grossmann, Jill Stephenson, Claudia Koonz, Gisela Bock), this book provides evidence that these ideals of performance—at odds with traditional norms of

separate spheres—were applied to women: “only intellectually qualified, strong, physically fit, and performance capable women were to bear healthy children” (182).

Hau’s careful analysis draws on wide-ranging sources from company archives, to government records, to academic studies. For example, instead of accepting at face value the participation numbers published in German newspapers of the 1940s, he investigates what circumstantial information in company archives might reveal about those numbers and concludes that National Socialist data were significantly exaggerated. Hau’s objective approach to his material means that his own perspective on the appropriate role of sports and exercise for the most part does not appear in these pages. Here and there the careful reader might find some small clues. He writes, for example, about the ways that the government and companies required sports participation after 1942 at the height of industrial mobilization for war: “From a health and fitness standpoint, forcing an overworked workforce to exercise made little sense” (173). Hau is convincing for the case of the manual laborer, but what about the secretary or white-collar worker who has spent most of the day sitting? Present-day research in exercise science does seem to suggest that people who exercise do benefit from decreased stress and depression and, as *New York Times* fitness expert Gretchen Reynolds even claims, “a nimble brain” (*New York Times*, December 9, 2015).

Hau’s careful approach to his subject is a particular merit of the book, but in the end it is hard to tell from his account how close German exercise experts came to achieving their larger objectives. Furthermore, some issues that are in the news now almost daily, such as children and exercise, children’s ability to perform, and obesity, do not appear at all in the book. Discussing these issues (or the reasons why they might not have been relevant to the figures he studies) would have enhanced the comparative aspects of the book and perhaps shed light on the widespread continuing obsession with exercise and fitness. In fairness, however, as much of this book focuses on the perspective from the workplace, an examination of children and exercise might logically be seen as the subject of a separate study. This book presents a fascinating comparison of ideas about sports and performance across very different political contexts and is an important contribution to the literature on biopolitics. Sophisticated, original, and richly detailed, Hau’s work sheds new light on the histories of sports, performance, health, state coercion, gender, and modernity in Germany.

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